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ABSTRACT

One in a series of discussion papers intended to promote exploration of issues related to volunteer motivation, recruitment, and development around the world, this report suggests that any country starting an intercultural exchange program may face problems similar to those encountered in Jamaica. The national director of an organization that operated adolescent and professional exchange programs in Jamaica outlined methods used to develop a volunteer base necessary for program operation. Elements identified as important in building the national organization included: initial steering group, building credibility, board structure, publicity and public relations, participation fees, and fundraising. Building a decentralized volunteer counseling network also was discussed.
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VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT FOR INTERCULTURAL
EXCHANGE PROGRAMS:
THE CASE OF JAMAICA

by Geof Brown

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January 1988

The AFS Center for the Study of Intercultural Learning

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THE A F S VOLUNTEER DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES

The AFS Volunteer Discussion Papers is a new publication series of The AFS Center for the Study of Intercultural Learning. This series is intended primarily for distribution among AFS volunteers and staff around the world, but will be shared with others upon request. The editors welcome contributions or inquiries about potential contributions from any AFS volunteer or staff member.

Each Discussion Paper reflects the opinions and experiences of its author, and does not necessarily represent the policies of the Trustees or the Administration of AFS Intercultural Programs, Inc. The Editors of this series hope that the Papers will generate discussion, and therefore welcome letters from readers wishing to express their own opinions about any topic addressed in any of the Discussion Papers.

Editors: Neal Grove and Bettina Hansel

The AFS Center for the Study of Intercultural Learning

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I N T R O D U C T I O N
to
T H E A F S V O L U N T E E R D I S C U S S I O N P A P E R S E R I E S

by
Don Mohanlal
Executive Vice President for Programs
AFS Intercultural Programs, Inc.

A key objective of AFS's long range plan is the development of our human resources. The first major step in this process is the Volunteer Resources Study, which our Center for the Study of Intercultural Learning is beginning this year in eight countries.

Our continued commitment to volunteers goes beyond the eight-country study, as indicated by this first number in The AFS Volunteer Discussion Paper Series. We hope that this series will focus more attention on the promise of volunteerism in all AFS countries.

The Discussion Papers are intended to be an internal AFS forum for the exploration of issues related to volunteer motivation, recruitment, and development around the world. They are called "Discussion Papers" because it is hoped that they will be the point of departure for continuing discussions within the AFS family of all aspects of volunteerism as we respond to the changing needs of society and of AFS.

I am pleased to introduce this new series and I hope that many of you will contribute articles or letters setting forth your views on the topic of volunteerism. For volunteerism is at the heart of all AFS program activities.

About the Author: Geoffrey Brown

Our National Director in Jamaica, Geof Brown, is the person responsible for setting up AFS programs in that country as an outreach effort of the University of the West Indies. Under Geof's leadership, AFS/Jamaica has become one of the fastest growing national units in the AFS world. After a visit to Jamaica, former AFS President Bill Dyal noted that AFS/Jamaica had achieved more in three years than other AFS national units had in ten.

Born in Jamaica, Geof spent several years abroad in the U.S. and Canada. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Political Science and Sociology and a Master's Degree in Social Work from Columbia University in New York, and has several management courses to his credit as well. A trained psychiatric social worker, Geof has much experience as a psychotherapist in New York and Toronto.

After several years in Toronto working as the Executive Director of the Brothers of Metropolitan Toronto Social Service, the Director of the Addiction Research Foundation, and a social development consultant, Geof returned to Jamaica where he is currently the Director of the Social Welfare Training Center at the Mona Campus of the University of the West Indies.

Geof is very committed to several social service organizations, to which he provides excellent organizational skills: the Rotary Club in Kingston, the Advisory Board on Child Development, the Human Employment and Resource Training Trust Board, the Social Development Commission, and the National Children's Home.

Tachi Cazal
International Regional Director
Central America and the Caribbean

VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT FOR INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMS:

THE CASE OF JAMAICA

Geoffrey Brown
University of the West Indies
National Director, AFS/Jamaica

Part I: Building a New AFS National Organization

Introduction

In its five years of operation, AFS/Jamaica has developed a vibrant national organization capable of operating adolescent and professional programs. Any country starting AFS programs for the first time may face some of the same problems that Jamaica has faced. This paper is intended to be a brief outline of how Jamaica developed (and is continuing to develop) the volunteer base it needs for operating AFS programs.

Initial Steering Group

The members of the initial steering group are obviously very important. In Jamaica's case we were careful to select a small working group of highly dependable people whom we identified as being basically interested in the idea of intercultural exchanges. A little bit of research was necessary to identify the first five persons. We have found in this, as in other similar kinds of organization building, that it is helpful to use the peer nomination technique. That is, identify a small cadre of highly keen and interested individuals and then have them nominate others whom they think will be similarly useful. Once this core working group has been started, it can expand itself to include others who are identified for the sake of the interest or expertise they possess, or the constituency or public they represent.

We found it important to insure that the core group would consist of people who would be dedicated workers. We were not concerned about building a large sponsorship group at the beginning. The people who are initially selected are going to be asked to do extensive volunteer work without the benefit of staff support. The larger the group, the more likely are fac-

tional disagreements and thus the possibility of getting bogged down. The initial group should be identified as a steering group only; in the beginning it should not be set up formally as a board of directors. The formal structure can come later on. The steering group will be interested only to the extent that its members are given real work to do. This, of course, is true for all volunteers.

Since most programs begin with high school exchanges, it is important to involve representatives of the ministry of education (or whatever similar body exists in the country) at the very outset, and to secure official approval from the top-most officials for the setting up of the organization. In our case, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education both gave approval at the start.

Building Credibility

Since any new organization must find its way among implicit or explicit competitors and will probably have its share of detractors, it is necessary to develop credibility. The first step, I believe, is to insure that the steering committee itself consists of credible people; the use of the peer nomination technique helps to insure this. The next step is to build the program in a manageable way. By this I mean that no more should be promised than can be delivered. The steering committee should think carefully about what is possible by way of sending and/or hosting programs and should be in a clear position to state the limitations of any early program to people who inquire about it. In our case, we started with a small group of ten high schools that were asked to nominate students for our sending program. When it was necessary to expand later on, instead of going to the schools ourselves we contacted the association of school principals so that we would gain credibility through them. By avoiding the appearance of being biased in favor of one or another set of schools, we also were careful not to develop enemies.

The building of credibility also is promoted by reliability. In cases where an organization begins without the benefit of office and staff, reliability requires that the embryonic organization must have stable contacts who can be reached at all convenient times. In the early days before our office was set up, we made available the phone numbers of three of our volunteers. The organization worked out of my office at the university until we were large enough to set up our own separate office structure.

Incidentally, "piggy-backing" on an established institution such as a university is an extremely valuable way to begin. This can be done through the outreach or extension service of

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the university or of any similar organization that has high credibility by virtue of its own history and/or status in the community. In fact, at all stages of the organization's development it is important to work with relevant established organizations that already have recognized status in the community. Wherever AFS programs can profit from association with organizations having a vested interest similar to that of AFS, or having contributions to make that can enhance AFS's work, this route should be followed.

Board Structure

I observed earlier that it is important to start with a small working group, not a large one, and that this working group should be a steering committee that is not formally constituted as a board of directors. Until the steering committee has established itself, with time being allowed for those who are not interested to fall away and for the recruitment of real workers to fill in the resulting attrition gaps, it is important not to develop a formal board structure. I also believe from many years of working with a great number of boards of directors of non-profit agencies and institutions that the best kind of structure for AFS national boards is that of an advisory rather than of a controlling board. In the case of advisory boards, one gains the built-in protection of having board members understand their role to be that of assisting and guiding rather than directing and controlling. There are many examples of controlling boards that get over-involved in the operational details of the organization, which sometimes tends to become very problematic.

I would advocate that, if possible, advisory boards be used exclusively and that controlling boards be avoided. If there has to be a controlling board for some reason, then rotation of membership should be built in at the very start. I would suggest one- or two-year memberships initially in order to give a chance for turnover to gradually reveal useful working talent. Those who prove their usefulness can be maintained in active status through some structure such as an executive committee that stays in place for three to four years or an honorary advisory board that stays in place indefinitely.

It is also important that the initial steering group be representative of a variety of constituencies with vested interests. For a new country that is likely to develop a variety of programs rather than concentrating on high school exchanges, this will mean drawing on a wide enough spectrum of interests to encompass all possible directions in which the programs might go. For instance, a lawyer who has a strong public service record, an educationist who has broad horizons, and a number of public spirited citizens who have diverse

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interests in civic affairs would be good representatives to have on the initial steering group, which will eventually become the first advisory board. Since there are no returnees at the early stage, they cannot be represented on the board; returnees can be added at a later stage.

In Jamaica, we drew upon educationists for roughly half of the board. We found that the educationists were necessary to help us establish good relationships with school system personnel. Such a high proportion of educationists might not be ideal in another national context, however. The realities of each country must be taken into account as decisions are made regarding the vested interests to be represented on the board and the individuals who will be asked to represent those interests.

Publicity and Public Relations

It is important to avoid a high public profile early in the development of the AFS organization. The problem with high profile publicity at the beginning is that, although it gives AFS programs a public identity, it raises expectations that a new program cannot meet. The result might be that the program is condemned at an early date for failing to deliver when in fact it did not yet have the capacity to do so. In Jamaica, we found that word-of-mouth within the school system was entirely sufficient at the beginning to spread word about the program. As our capacity developed, we were able to draw in a larger number of schools; when we finally developed a number of new programs, we gradually extended our publicity. Now that we are well established and know what we're doing, we are employing high profile publicity because we can deliver as well as any other well developed organization. And it is useful to have high profile publicity to aid wider growth, especially with reference to home-finding for the family stay.

Publicity isn't the same as public relations. The public relations effort that is necessary during the initial stage arises largely from the need to build credibility and then to maintain reliability. It is necessary also in order to build your contacts with the various vested interest organizations with whom you intend to develop programs. For instance, in developing our language exchange program we worked with a national training institute for languages as well as with the Linguistics Department of the University of the West Indies. Using these two bodies, we were able to put together a program rapidly by having the training institute take care of the content of the training and the Linguistics Department provide the laboratory for the actual training to take place.

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The public relations effort for other kinds of programs followed a similar pattern. For example, when we were developing the Lawyer Exchange Program we asked the Bar Association of Jamaica to advise us on suitable candidates for the program and to give other advice; in developing the new Teacher Exchange Program, we worked very closely with the Ministry of Education. In the latter case, our public relations effort paid off when, during one of our routine visits to the Minister of Education to report on our progress, we mentioned the Spanish Teacher Exchange Program as something we had in mind. The Minister commended AFS for its progress and indicated a strong interest in this program. We then requested the Minister to lend us a staff member for a few months to help coordinate the program. He agreed, and we obtained the free services of a staff member from the Ministry of Education. In developing our Journalist Exchange Program, we are working with the Head of the School of Journalism at the University of the West Indies; this person is a practicing journalist with strong connections with media houses and press associations in the Caribbean. The principle of good public relations is clear from these examples.

Participation Fees and Fundraising

Collecting participation fees is always a concern and may require innovative practices. For example, AFS must charge an installment fee in the case of each family who wishes to spread the payment of its participation fee over several months. We found that we could emphasize the "discount" aspect in trying to persuade natural parents to pay prior to their child's departure from Jamaica. (Everybody wants some kind of advantage; it's like having a "sale.") In this way we saved a great deal of money and energy that otherwise might have been spent trying to collect delinquent fees.

In order to raise funds we have followed most of the conventional patterns. It is important to remember that, especially in the case of new organizations, raising "in kind" donations can be as helpful as raising cash. For example, the new organization may need equipment for the office such as desks, chairs, photocopy equipment, and so on. All of these we have obtained in Jamaica as "in kind" donations from various organizations.

Part II: Building a Decentralized Volunteer Counseling Network

Rationale

As described in the report of the Montréal Workshop, personal crises not only bring about intercultural learning during an intercultural homestay but also inevitably create a need for counseling. The problems that require resolution through counseling come at various levels of complexity. AFS's regular staff members are not necessarily equipped to handle the more serious levels of difficulty. On the other hand, staff members sometimes become burdened with counseling chores that could be shared with others, especially when the level of difficulty is low and advice-giving is all that is required.

Even when AFS staff members are equipped by virtue of professional training to respond to serious counseling needs, the demands of their routine responsibilities diminish their availability as well as their effectiveness as counselors. Staff "burn-out" is a consequence of the double demands on AFS staff for counseling plus routine duties; this is especially true in smaller countries where the limited number of staff members prevents the development of specialization.

As a volunteer-based organization, AFS needs to find ways of utilizing volunteer expertise and skills in the area of counseling as well as in other areas. These considerations provide the rationale for the establishment of a volunteer counseling network that is decentralized in order to ensure quick response to counseling problems at the local level.

The Jamaica Experience

In attempting to develop a counseling network at the local level that would relieve the regular staff, we recognized that the various levels of problem complexity would require different levels of counseling sophistication. Therefore, we developed a corps of volunteers with counseling skills and responsibilities that reflected the varying levels of needed skills. Accordingly, the following levels of counselor expertise were recruited:

- clinical psychologists and psychiatrists
- trained, experienced social workers
- trained, experienced educationists
- selected volunteer board members
- selected volunteer peer counselors

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The manner in which the individuals in these categories were developed into a decentralized counseling network functioning at local levels is described below.

Developing the Network

The key to developing an effective counseling network at the local level is the local volunteer board member or the chairperson of the local volunteer chapter. Such persons are already committed to the organization in responsible roles and therefore can be relied upon to coordinate the counseling expertise available at the local level. Such a counseling network functions as follows:

When a staff member becomes aware that a problem of some kind has developed, he or she brings the matter to the attention of the local board member or chapter chairperson, who in turn explores the nature of the difficulty and communicates information to the staff member. The staff member assesses the level of complexity of the problem and offers suggestions about how to proceed. If advice-giving seems a sufficient response to the problem, the local board member or chapter chairperson either carries out this task or delegates it to a competent local person (such as a peer counselor or an educationist). In either case, the AFS staff member is kept informed regarding the steps taken and their outcomes.

If the nature of the problem indicates a need for professional counseling, the local board member or chapter chairperson asks one of the professional social workers to handle the case. During and after the time that this professional counseling is taking place, other supportive counseling may be supplied by the local board member or chapter chairperson, or by some other volunteer (such as an educationist), under the supervision of the AFS staff member.

If the nature of the problem seems to indicate a serious psychological difficulty, a clinical psychologist or psychiatrist who has volunteered to be on call is assigned. In Jamaica's experience, this is a rare occurrence. But when this level of difficulty does occur, it is important that there be coordinated teamwork among the psychologist or psychiatrist, the local board member or chapter chairperson, the AFS staff member who is handling the case, and any other person who has been involved in advising the participant. Although some remuneration may be necessary for a high level of professional skill (such as that of the psychiatrist or psychologist), in practice one should use volunteers whenever possible and pay honorariums to professionals rather than full-scale fees.¹

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Peer Counseling

All AFS participants on high school exchange programs are assigned to a peer counselor who is an AFS returnee. The returnee is required merely to be supportive; he or she is not a substitute for a professional counselor. The advantage of a peer counselor is that confidences often are more readily shared with a peer than with an adult. Such confidences may be clues to the nature of the participant's problems, and/or may might indicate a way of resolving those problems. A peer counselor should try to develop an on-going relationship with the participant; such a relationship can enable the peer to detect "early warning signals" of problems and to assess the degree of progress that is occurring in case the participant receives assistance from a professional counselor.

There is a fair amount of literature available on peer counseling; those who wish to use peers as counselors should consult recent publications. The main caution that appears in the literature is that any peer counselor must operate under clear guidelines indicating that his or her responsibility is not that of a professional counselor and that AFS cannot share confidential documents with the peer counselor. The peer counseling relationship is that of an organized "buddy system" rather than a formal counseling relationship. Even with these limitations, however, peer counseling can be an important part of the participant support process.

Advantages of a Volunteer Counseling Network

A properly organized decentralized volunteer counseling network insures that a quick response can be made at the local level to problems that may arise for the participant, the host family, or the host school. Such a network not only saves time but also saves the expenses that would be incurred if staff members needed to respond to every difficulty. Even more important, perhaps, is that local volunteers (including recent returnees) are involved in a meaningful activity that enables them to develop into an experienced corps that will prove useful in the future as programs expand and new programs are attempted. Such a decentralized corps of active, experienced people can only strengthen the national AFS organization.

¹ AFS/Jamaica is fortunate to have made these contacts. But even where such professionals have not volunteered, the National Office must be able to provide such services whenever they are required, and must pay for them as necessary. (Editors)